

### The Book of Judges

#### Lesson 26 - Chapters 18 and 19

Judges chapter 18 is the story the tribe of Dan looking for a new place to live. And despite the appearance of this story in the final chapters of the book of Judges this event actually took place just a few decades after Joshua's death, at around the time of first Judge of Israel Othniel.

To help explain that the era of the Judges was one of spiritual darkness for Israel, the culprit being a return to the old ways of their Egyptian style of religion mixed with the Canaanite Mystery Babylon superstitions of their neighbors, we find this rather detailed narrative of a fellow named Micah who lives in the northern hills of the territory of Ephraim. Micah was a well to do Hebrew (maybe even quite rich) and this is reflected in the previous chapter where Micah's story begins, and he has just admitted to stealing 1100 pieces of silver from his own mother (a very sizeable sum of money to have on hand).

200 pieces of that silver was used to cast an image of Yehoveh, where it would be placed in Micah's private home sanctuary along with some other gods and idols. Micah even went so far as to hire, and then consecrate on his own authority, an itinerate Levite as his priest. Thus we see how confused and mixed up Israel's religion had become in only a generation after Joshua's outstanding leadership of Israel ended in his death.

Hopefully we can take it to heart that it is easy (if not natural and inevitable) that men will gravitate away from God's truth and towards one more to their liking; the result being a set (or many sets) of traditions, customs and doctrines that sound quite pious, and good, and peaceful, and right. But in fact these many of these doctrines are not actually in line with the Word of God. Probably Judeo-Christianity can be held up as the prime example in all of history of this kind of syncretism that mixes culture, agenda, personal preferences and general comfort level with divine oracle; so we need not be so surprised at what we read here if we'll just take an honest assessment of where Judaism and the Church stands today and compare it to the bible itself.

And of course Micah, his young priest, and the men of the tribe of Dan who come to visit them don't see any wrong mindedness in their thinking; they see no wickedness in their actions; they see no perversion in their worship before God. Yet this is entire story is about faith gone astray and a people who deny it.

As we ended our last lesson, the scouts from Dan were returning to Micah's house after what in their eyes had been a wonderfully successful journey; they had stumbled across the perfect place for their tribe to relocate. The place was called Laish, located near the border of

Lebanon. The city was inhabited by a gentle and peace loving people who had no apparent alliances with any formidable kings or princes and the area was fertile and had an abundance of water. The city's defenses were nearly non-existent, and thus the Danites could conquer the city rather easily.

After the scouts went back to the Danite cities of Tzarah and Eshta'ol and reported their find to the elders and tribal leaders, 600 soldiers and their families packed up and headed north to claim their prize from the unsuspecting people of Laish. This column of around 3000 Danites followed a trail that led nearby to Micah's house, where the 5 scouts decided to steal Micah's YHWH idol and take his priest with them to become their own priest. Micah's priest was not kidnapped: he was offered a bigger job with more prestige and he would be priest over an entire city and tribe, whereby currently he was only priest for a single family. It was too tempting of an offer not to accept.

Let's pickup with verse 22 and read the remaining verses of Judges 18.

### RE-READ JUDGES 18:22- end

Micah and the people who lived in his village were pretty upset with those soldiers of Dan who took their idols and their priest so they followed them for a while and then confronted them. Since Dan had 600 men who were ready to fight, and apparently with the will to do so, they threatened Micah and his posse with death if they didn't shut up about wanting their idols and ritual implements back. Knowing they could not win a battle against Dan, Micah and his contingent returned home empty handed.

Verse 27 explains that Dan did what they came to do; when they reached Laish they attacked, killed the people and burned the city. And sure enough no one came to the aid of the citizens of Laish.

As was customary Laish was renamed Dan; they set up the silver image they had stolen from Micah and began their cult worship, with the young Levite presiding. I told you last week that this Levite was not a real God-authorized priest, because he was not from the proper priestly line of the tribe of Levi; and I told you I'd reveal this week how I knew that. Well here's where we find out; verse 30 explains that this Levite's name is **Y'honatan** (Jonathon), and he is of the clan of **Gershom**. The problem is that **Gershom** was a clan of regular Levites, while only those from the clan of Aaron could be priests. But there is also a confusing reference to Manessah contained within this Levite's identity; because Manessah is in no way connected to the tribe of Levi. So what gives? Let's look at this briefly because it gives an interesting insight into the minds of those who penned the bible that we read today.

The issue is a translation error that is somewhat intentional. The consonants that form the name of Jonathon's family line (as spelled in the oldest texts available) that are translated in many bibles as Manessah (like here in our CJB) are m-s-h, or in the Hebrew alphabet **Mem-Shin-Heh**; these are the same consonants that form the name "Moses" (remember, the original Hebrew script ONLY uses consonants and no vowels). However what we actually find is that a tiny "n", **a nun**,"? " was written above and between the **Mem** ? and the **Shin** ?(the m

and the s) in some of the ancient Hebrew texts that make the name, properly, Manessah. Point being that the **nun** didn't belong there; it was added at some later date by an editor who didn't want to corrupt the text, but in a strange way of thinking by making the letter **nun** tiny and placed above the other letters it allowed the reader to choose to say Moses or Manessah. Why would they do that? Well if left alone it says that Jonathon was of the clan of Gershon, son of Moses; by adding the **nun** it says Jonathon was of the clan of Gershon, but Gershon was the son of Manessah. The Talmud explains this anomaly and the reason behind it this way:

“ Was he (Jonathon) the son of Gershom or was he not rather a son (a descendant) of Moses? As it is written, the sons of Moses were Gershon and Eleazar. But because of the (wicked) deeds of Manessah, the idolatrous son of Hezekiah, the Scriptures assign Gershom to the family of Manessah. Rabbi Bar Channa said: The prophet studiously avoided calling Gershom the son of Moses because it would have been ignominious to Moses to have an ungodly son (meaning Jonathon). So he (the later editor of Judges) calls this person the son of Manessah by raising the **nun** above the line to show that it might be either inserted or omitted”.

Bottom line: whoever edited the oldest Hebrew Scriptures we currently have felt it disrespectful to Moses to link this Levite disguising as a priest to him. So since Manessah was known to be idolatrous, it was better to assign this fake priest to Manessah's family line instead of sullyng Moses'. Interestingly the Greek Septuagint (written about 250 years before Christ) did not offer this option, and they more accurately say that Jonathon was indeed a descendant of Moses, which he was. This is NOT the only place this kind of thing happens in the bible, and sometimes I'll pause to point them out to you when appropriate. Let's move on.

This chapter ends with an interesting reference to Micah's idol being used by the Tribe of Dan "as long as the house of God was in Shiloh". Shiloh was where the Wilderness Tabernacle (called generically the house of God) was erected and semi- permanently located when Israel entered the Promised Land. It was there where the official Priesthood operated. It would later be transferred to Beit-el, and we'll even find the Ark of the Covenant gets moved around quite a bit more then the sacred tent itself. Point being that almost immediately after Joshua wasn't around to run things with an iron rod, every element of Hebrew society began backsliding at an alarming rate. Thus the resounding and repeated underlying premise for the entire book of Judges: "There was no king in Israel so every man did what was right in his own eyes."

Turn your bibles to Judges 19.

### **READ JUDGES CHAPTER 19 all**

This story probably took place even earlier than the story of Micah, the silver image of God, and the Levite who masqueraded as a priest. It represents one of the most infamous outrages against the Lord that is recorded in Holy Scripture, one that authors of biblical writings of much later eras referred to (so well known and repeated was this sad episode).

The theme of the book of Judges begins the story: "There was no king in Israel". There was no law and order because there was no central authority. Although this sojourning Levite who lived in the hills of Ephraim sounds an awful lot like our previous story, it is not the same fellow

but it does illustrate that Micah's Levite hireling was not an isolated instance at all; it had become quite common for Levites to seek position and advancement wherever it could be found.

The set-up is that this anonymous Levite living in the more northern area of Ephraim had taken on a concubine whose family home was in Beit-Lechem of Judah, meaning that she was NOT a Levite but a Judahite. But at some point there was a serious problem and the woman left him and went back to her father. Verse 2 explains the nature of the problem; or does it? The CJB along with the KJV and many others says that the concubine was unfaithful to her Levite husband or some say outright that she played the harlot or acted like a whore. Now in the Hebrew the latter translation is absolutely the correct one because the Hebrew word used to describe her was that she was a **zonah**, meaning a prostitute, or (in some manuscripts) that she behaved **zanah**, which means she acted in an unfaithful manner.

However other translations will say she was angry with her husband and left him. And, those are equally good translations because they are drawn from ancient Aramaic texts and also from the Greek Septuagint, which speak of anger and NOT unfaithfulness or sexual immorality. The general consensus of Rabbis is that the Levite and his concubine had an argument of some kind and she had NOT been unfaithful to him (at least not sexually speaking). The reason is that by both the Mosaic Law and the customs and traditions of that era, a concubine or wife who had an adulterous affair was to be summarily executed. And there is no hint in this story that she was in any danger of being harmed.

Let me remind you that a concubine (**pilegesh** in Hebrew) was like a 2nd class wife. Thus it was common for the bible to refer to the man as her husband. Simplistically speaking the difference between a concubine and wife was that the wife had more rights, and had a marriage contract. But concubines were not slaves, could not be mistreated any more than could a legal wife, and they were not acquired as playful sex objects or mistresses as is sometimes erroneously depicted.

We see in verse 3 that her husband was concerned enough for her that after 4 months time (even if it was only a selfish concern that he preferred her company) that he took the rather substantial journey from the northern hill country down to Bethlehem in Judah to try and win her back. He brought a house servant with him (undoubtedly for protection as traveling alone in those days was dangerous) and two donkeys. One was for her to ride on the return journey (hopefully). Undoubtedly several gifts for both the concubine and her father were provided as well.

The fact that she brought her husband into her father's house shows that whatever caused the split-up it was not irreconcilable; and it also says that her father was glad to meet him. Translation: the father was VERY relieved that his daughter would be going back with her husband. I say that not in the sense it probably sounds to us today (as though he wanted rid of his daughter) but rather in the sense that it was very dishonorable for a family to have a girl get married (or become a concubine) and then become separated from her husband. If (God forbid) the separation grew to an outright divorce it brought great shame upon the whole family regardless of the reason or who might be to blame. Dad had been sweating it out.

On the 4th day after his arrival the Levite man was ready to leave but the father in law wanted him to stay a bit longer. Likely this was a simple matter of Middle Eastern hospitality; visitors were rare and protocol required making the most of your time together. The father in law pressed on the Levite to stay and he agreed to, but on the 5th day he took his concubine and left in the afternoon.

The Levite, his concubine and his servant set out for home and their route took them to **Jevus** (Jebus); this was the name of the city that would eventually be renamed to Jerusalem. Jebus was around 6 miles from Bethlehem, around a 2-hour walk. The people who founded and controlled the city were called Jebusites, and they were just another group of Canaanites. Since it was getting near to sundown the servant suggested that they spend the night inside the massive defensive walls of **Jevus** but the Levite refused because indeed **Jevus** was a city of non-Israelites. Instead he preferred that they travel a little further and stay in a village or city that was occupied by Hebrews: **Gibeah** or **Ramah**.

They only made it as far as Gibeah by the time darkness was setting in so they stopped there. Gibeah was in the territory of Benjamin and so it's residents were Israelites.

Verse 15 explains that they went in side the city and sat down at what we would call the city square, just inside the city gate; such a thing would make him noticeable to the city's residents as they passed in and out. There is a hint of what was to come, though, in that the reason that he sat in the square is that no one would offer them hospitality; no one would give them a place to stay for the evening. This was a sacred duty in that era and the failure of the local residents to offer rest and sustenance to a traveler (especially one who obviously had the means to feed himself and his animals if needs be) was a sign that these people were of poor character.

At dark an old man came through the city gates, a man who had been working out in the fields that surrounded Gibeah. Coincidentally this old man was from the same area that the Levite hailed, and was neither a permanent resident of Gibeah nor was he of the tribe of Benjamin. That the old man did not share in the morals of Gibeah is evident in that he does the right thing and offers to take the Levite, his concubine and servant, into his dwelling place for the night.

Of course the old man first inquires after them and asks the logical question, "where are you going and where are you from?" The Levite is truthful and explains where he's from and that he's returning there; but the latter part of the answer is puzzling. He says that he's going to the house of Adonai (or more accurately the **Beit-Yehoveh**). But what does that mean, that he's going to the house of Yehoveh? Almost certainly he was merely saying that he was going to go home by way of Shiloh, which was the current location of the Wilderness Tabernacle. He was a Levite and so it would be logical that if he had an opportunity to visit the Tabernacle, home of the priesthood, he would go there to offer a sacrifice. But there is another implication in this scene that some Jewish scholars point out; the Levite traveler was probably recognizable as a Levite. Levites had for some reason quickly developed a dialect or accent (as we saw played a role in our previous story) that was different enough from the other Hebrews that it helped to identify them. He may well have also worn garments or some ritual object of clothing that marked him as a Levite. In any case the REASON that the town of

Gibeah wouldn't offer him hospitality was that they didn't want anything to do with the Priestly Tribe. They may have been Israelites but their hearts were far from God.

The Levite explained to the old man that even though they would be no burden on anyone (because they carried all of their own provisions with them), the townspeople refused to offer them shelter; so the old man says to come and stay with him, but whatever they do don't stay out in the city square at night. This matter of avoiding bedding down in the city square (which would have been lawful and safe under most circumstances) had little to do with discomfort; rather it was a dire warning from someone who knew these townspeople well.

The next scene is reminiscent of the sad adventure of Lot while he was living in the city of Sodom. The old man was playing host his guests when suddenly there was a knock on his door. In fact his house was surrounded by some worthless men of Gibeah who were demanding that he send out the Levite so that they could have homosexual sex with him. In the Hebrew these worthless men are called **ben-Belial**, or sons of Belial, a very derogatory expression. It is used in many places in the bible and is used to label those who commit idolatry, or gross rebellion against God, or who commit lewd and immoral acts. And it says that these sons of Belial **daphak** upon the old man's door. This definitely does not mean to knock, nor does it even mean to merely beat. Rather it means to beat VIOLENTLY with ever increasing force. This was a mob that meant business and was not going to take "no" for an answer.

The old man had to address this situation; he couldn't just huddle inside and hope these perverts went away. So he opened his door to address them. Now before I discuss with you what he offered to the crowd in hopes of appeasing them, let me first explain WHY he offered it. I have explained many times the Oriental mindset concerning hospitality. Among the several things that hospitality entailed in that era, protection of the houseguests was paramount. There was no greater shame than for a host to allow something terrible to befall a guest in his home. Hosts were obligated (by custom) to defend their guests with the cost of their own lives or their family's lives if necessary. Just as families today have set up an unspoken hierarchy whereby the children are protected at all costs by the adult family members (and even the younger children are protected almost out of instinct by the older), it was the same sort of thing with families that took in travelers whom they had never before met.

So the old man offers to send out his own unmarried daughter (called a virgin) as well as the Levite's concubine for them to gang rape, in trade for keeping the males safe. In ancient times, and still in many Eastern societies today (including the more fundamental sects of Islam) women are chattel. Women have far less value than men, and very often less value than the farm animals. The Laws of Moses were the first to value women equally with men, and to insist on the humane treatment of women, and to give women far more rights than they had ever before known. Don't get me wrong: the bible still presents a hierarchy whereby men are to be the authority. But men are to be an authority over women in love, and for the purpose of caring for women, not for the purpose of using them or virtually enslaving them.

However worldwide customs and traditions infiltrate everything. And the Hebrew society remained a male-dominated society. What we see happening in this regard to the women in

this story is not acceptable before the Lord.

Let me also point out what makes this story so extraordinarily shocking. Certainly that homosexuality is at the center of it is undeniable and it is at the top of the list of godless perversions throughout the bible, Old Testament and New. But what we must also see is that while we've witnessed this all before in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, at least the residents of those cities were pagans; they didn't know God. But the men of Gibeah who are demanding homosexual sex with the old man's male guests here in the book of Judges are Hebrews; they are Benjamites. They had the Torah. Their parents were part of the Exodus. Joshua had only recently died. This mob consisted of God's set-apart people who were no more than one generation removed from Moses.

The old man handed over his daughter and the Levite's concubine to the men of Gibeah (no doubt with the Levite's consent who chose to sacrifice this woman to save himself). They were abused all night long, and only ceased at daybreak. Nothing more is said of the old man's daughter; but we're informed that the concubine somehow made it back to the door step of where her husband was hiding, and there died of her injuries with her hands reaching towards the bolted door.

At daybreak the Levite went outside to leave, and there found his woman. He told her to get up so they could be on their way; but there was of course no response. He immediately knew she was dead so he loaded her corpse on one of the two donkeys and left for home.

It is not only the horrific action of the men of Gibeah that are on display here, but the callous and cold heart of the Levite who is utterly indifferent to his concubine's suffering. I said at the beginning of this story that I suspected the entire reason for the Levite going after his concubine, after she angrily left him and went home to her father, was selfish. He preferred to have her company than not, but that's about as far as it went. Perhaps he thought her leaving him would be an embarrassment. That he went to Bethlehem to fetch her back with gifts and a donkey for her to ride home was simply the price needed for him to get her back; a price he could afford with little discomfort. But that price certainly didn't include any risk taking or repentance on his part, nor did it mean that he would love her and protect her.

The sin of Gibeah would long be remembered and mentioned many centuries later in Hosea 9:9 and 10:9, so great was the shame it brought upon all Israel.

***CJB Hosea 9:9 They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Giv'ah. He will remember their guilt, and he will punish their sins.***

***CJB Hosea 10:9 "Since the days of Giv'ah you have sinned, Isra'el. There they took their stand. For these arrogant people at Giv'ah, war was insufficient punishment.***

When the Levite arrived home, he did some so drastic that it is hard to even read about without cringing; he took his concubine's body and cut it up into 12 pieces, sending one piece by messenger to each Israelite tribe.

I don't even know where to begin to talk about this. The Levite obviously had no regard for his concubine before or after her death. That he would cut-up her body is a terrible desecration that is simply not allowed by Torah standards. She was to be properly buried, not used as a means for this Levite to display his anger. But the Hebrew word used to for "cutting-up" or (better) "dividing" her body into pieces is a word that is normally reserved for Tabernacle ritual; the word is **nathach**. **Nathach** means to divide up the sacrificial animal into pieces for putting onto the Altar of Burnt Offering. That it is used here is out of place and thus seems to indicate that the Levite had some delusional sense of piety or righteous anger or twisted belief that if he was the one doing the cutting up (because he was a Levite) that it made it a proper religious act.

Taken together with the other young Levite of our previous story who allowed himself to become a priest (when he was not of the proper lineage), and even to worship **Teraphim** (god idols); and then that he would leave Micah to go be a priest for the tribe of Dan and set up cult worship in Laish, paints a pretty bad picture of the Hebrew religious leaders of the era of the Judges.

See, the Levites were the butchers of that era. They were highly trained in just how to dissect an animal for sacrificial purposes, and then later on how to prepare an animal for food according to the kosher traditions that slowly developed. Even today it is usually Levites who will run Kosher butcher shops. This Levite man simply applied his skill to his dead concubine for personal reasons.

Things like this don't go unnoticed. Verse 30 explains that when the people saw this, they were appalled as they had never seen such an awful thing happen (at least among their own culture). The question on everyone's mind was what to do about all this? What should be done about the homosexual men in Gibeah who literally raped the concubine to death?

But also, what should be done about the tribe of Benjamin in general who apparently didn't show enough interest in the matter to bring those men to justice? That's what is dealt with in the final two chapters of the book of Judges, and we'll get into that next time.